

## ALTERNATIVE MARKETING STRATEGIES IN COMMERCIAL ECO FASHION\*

Arzu VURUŞKAN\*, Jörn FRÖHLICH\*\*

### ABSTRACT

Fashion brands and companies that wish to market eco-fashion aim to benefit from the use of marketing campaigns addressing the fulfilment of this megatrend's lifestyle aspects. The promoted "green" lifestyle is reflected on to the fashion items by means of a strong brand image, which is as important as the product itself. Therefore eco-fashion is ultimately bonded with brand architecture and all its visual components- from hangtag to store-design. Most fashion brands have incorporated terms such as eco, green, natural, organic and sustainable into their marketing campaigns in order to establish an association between their brand name and the environment, as well as shifting their business philosophy to socially responsible (and/ or politically correct) business practices, so that the customers are already familiar with the conventional marketing concept promoting the LOHAS lifestyle. Creating a serious awareness for alternative thinking and responsible acting towards the environment requires alternative media to bring new messages across in order to differentiate them from conventional LOHAS marketing messages – making them more authentic and therefore more credible. This study investigates the relative importance of alternative marketing strategies of environmental friendly eco-fashion products and global responsibility reaching out to the younger generation.

**Keywords:** Eco-Fashion, Visual Marketing, Fashion Branding, Alternative Marketing, LOHAS.

### "EKOLOJİK MODA" MARKALARINDA ALTERNATİF PAZARLAMA STRATEJİLERİ

#### ÖZET

Çevre dostu-ekolojik moda ürünlerini ve bu kavramı pazarlama stratejilerine dahil etmek isteyen moda markaları, bu yeni trendi vurgulayan çeşitli kampanyalardan yararlanmaktadır. Moda ürünlerinin yanı sıra, marka imajı ile birlikte öne sürülen yaşam tarzı, ürünün kendisi kadar önem taşımaktadır. Bu sebeple, ekolojik moda kavramı, markanın yapısı ve tüm görsel bileşenleri ile birlikte, ürün etiketinden mağaza tasarımına kadar güçlü bir şekilde bağlanabilir. Moda markaları, sosyal sorumluluğu esas alan girişimleri ve uygulamalarının yanı sıra, LOHAS yaşam biçimini müşterilere tanıtabilmek ve çevreci yaklaşımlarını marka kimliği ile birleştirebilmek için eko, yeşil, doğal, organik ve sürdürülebilir gibi kavramları marka isimlerine, logolarına, ürün etiketlerine ve tüm görsel pazarlama araçlarına dahil etmektedirler. Alternatif düşünce tarzlarını yaratarak, çevreye duyarlılık sağlamak, yeni mesajlar veren farklı araçlar ve yöntemleri gerektirmektedir. Bu şekilde, daha gerçekçi ve dolayısıyla daha geçerli olacak şekilde, geleneksel LOHAS pazarlama düşüncelerinden farklılık yaratılması amaçlanmaktadır. Bu çalışma, daha çok gençlere yönelik olarak hazırlanan, ekolojik moda ve küresel sorumluluk ile ilgili alternatif pazarlama stratejilerinin önemini incelemektedir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Ekolojik Moda, Görsel Pazarlama, Moda Marka, Alternatif Pazarlama, LOHAS.

**Introduction:** The relationship between fashion, sustainability and ethical issues covers a wide range of actions and is analysed in various perspectives. Ethical fashion can be defined as "fashion clothing that is produced under fair trade principles in sweatshop-free labor conditions, with efforts made to reduce the environmental harmfulness of the process" (Joergens, 2006). Apart from the transformation of fashion products and fashion processes to the direction of sustainability, Fletcher and Grosse (2011:8) also add fashion systems as another category to credit sustainability in fashion. Each section requires different approaches, qualifications and routes to investigate the sustainability issues in fashion and to create a change. Consumers' social and environmental concerns have grown in the last decade more than before, and the interest in eco-fashion has also grown consequently. Meyer (2001) claims that there has been a significant growth in green product introductions in the first half of the 1990s. The biggest changes in the customer profile are seen especially with the younger generation. As indicated by Ma, Littrell and Niehm (2012) the younger generation seems more receptive to company's effort to support social problems in their purchase decision. With the changing demand of consumers, many apparel and fashion brands are shifting their business philosophy to socially responsible (and/or politically correct) business practices incorporating terms such as eco, green, natural, organic and sustainable into their marketing campaigns. Yan, Hyllegard and Blaesi (2012) claim that companies have modified marketing strategies in an effort to promote brands and often incorporate terms such as eco, green, natural, organic, and sustainable in their promotional messages, including in or on, brand names/logos, product labels, advertisements, and company websites. In this study, it is chosen to refer as eco-fashion to this green and ethics related movement. This study aims to investigate the relative importance of branding by analysing alternative apparel/fashion brands' visual marketing strategies and by discussing sample campaigns, the new media and the given message as well as the LOHAS consumer profile. The focus

\* This study was presented as a paper at the "1st International Fashion and Textile Design Symposium" organized between the 8th and 10th October 2012 by the Department of Fashion and Textile Design, Faculty of Fine Arts, Akdeniz University.

\*Asst. Prof. Dr., Department of Fashion and Textile Design, Izmir University of Economics, arzu.vuruskan@ieu.edu.tr.

\*\*Instr., Department of Fashion and Textile Design, Izmir University of Economics, jorn.frohlich@ieu.edu.tr.

is on new and alternative marketing campaigns (alternative in content, format and media) related with apparel/fashion brands to understand the profile of new target customers connecting this brand identity with sustainability and fashion. In terms of visual marketing, new media and platforms (such as Twitter, Facebook) and formats (guerilla marketing, flashmobs, etc.) are being discovered in order to not just give a new message, but create an awareness in (especially the younger) consumer's mind for the need of new "sustainable" ways of thinking.

**Analysing the Issue of Branding in Eco-Fashion And Target Customer:** Analysing consumer interest to buying environmental friendly and socially responsible fashion products is one main direction within eco-fashion, which sets up the base for marketing strategies. In order to analyse the personal values, beliefs, knowledge and attitudes relating to the intentions to purchase apparel from socially responsible businesses, Dickson (2000) claimed that consumers are concerned, but are not prepared to juggle this concern in their apparel consumer decisions. Pickett-Baker and Ozaki (2008) state that consumers have difficulty in identifying brands that are truly environmentally friendly, and that perform effectively, although consumers are willing to buy green products. As an example of a fashion specific analysis for the impact of ethical fashion on consumer purchase behaviour, Shen, Wang, Lo and Shum (2012) examined consumers' willingness in Hong Kong to pay a premium for ethical fashion. Their results included consumers' willingness to support ethical fashion businesses, but also their lack of knowledge.

Additionally, it is seen that traditional consumer behaviour has also shown changes especially for the young customer. Examining young female consumers' purchase behaviours related to non-food fair trade product, Ma, Littrell and Niehm (2012) discussed the needs of younger customers and the necessity of promotional marketing strategies that may encourage this particular consumer segment to engage in fair trade purchases. Considering the importance of younger consumers, Bennett, Sagas and Dees (2006) suggested that the young consumers have received considerable attention from marketers and advertisers, since targeting young populations can help develop strong, lifelong relationships as consumers of products and services. They implied the effect of alternative media preferences and underlined the importance of understanding the consumption behaviours of this important segment. Similar to this study, Cordiner (2001) also states that the young generation is heavily influenced by a variety of media, with television, movies, magazines, video games and additionally internet communication channels, which are the main factors shaping their perceptions and beliefs adding that marketers need to understand this dynamic in order to communicate successfully with younger.

**Target Customers for Eco-Fashion:** Fashion brands and companies that wish to market eco-fashion aim to benefit from the use of alternative campaigns in order to differentiate themselves and to target directly to the niche groups for eco-fashion.

**Visual Brand Architecture:** The key in visual brand architecture is to create customer loyalty based on visually communicated brand values, brand image and brand promise. Figure 1 shows the hierarchy of brand architecture in terms of visual marketing, retail design and visual merchandising. The promoted "green" lifestyle is reflected on to the fashion items by means of a strong brand image, which is as important as the product itself. Therefore eco-fashion is ultimately bonded with brand architecture, identification of the target customer and all visual components of branding. Since the target group of eco-fashion has a different tendency, it is necessary to design subsequent levels accordingly.



Figure 1: Visual brand architecture (Fröhlich, 2008)

**LOHAS (Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability):** According to the Maslow's motivation theory (1954), psychological needs, called as the "hierarchy of needs" form a pyramid, starting with physical needs and continuing in the order of security needs, social needs, social esteem and self actualization. Similarly Manfred Max Neef's (1991) taxonomy of human needs refers to the same idea. In his approach, he identified nine fundamental human needs and four satisfiers for these needs as being, having doing and interacting. According to his scale, creation, identity and freedom refer to the top three sections. These theories can guide for the understanding of consumer trends, which are mostly based on self-actualization. This is where fashion and sustainability stand, since these can be called as a lifestyle at the top of hierarchy pyramid to reflect self-actualization. For branding, it is crucial to interpret this lifestyle through images and communicate with the customer through visual marketing tools and media.

Analysing the target group for eco-fashion, it is possible to associate the target group with a specific lifestyle known recently as LOHAS. LOHAS is introduced as an acronym for “Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability”, a market segment focused on health and fitness, the environment, personal development, sustainable living, and social justice (LOHAS,2012). Cortese writes an article in the “New York Times” in 2003 and mentions about LOHAS saying that the name is coined at the late 90s by marketers trying to define what they regarded as a growing opportunity for products and services that appeal to a certain type of consumer. For Emerich (2011), LOHAS receives the ultimate validation when it is subject to this full page article in “New York Times” in 2003. She emphasises the position of LOHAS as being new, progressive, forward-looking, visionary and transformative.

The debates concerning responsible and sustainable consumption as well as the increasing importance of LOHAS contributed to the growing market supply of fashion with a social-ecological image. Especially the LOHAS, representing a high-income consumer group, are expected to promote the demand for fashionable and sustainable garments. LOHAS consumer profile shows some differences from the regular environmentalist “greenie” profile. Table 1 shows a comparison of the “fashionable” LOHAS trend to the original green Eco movement.

**Table 1:** Comparison of the original green Eco movement to LOHAS consumer profile.

Environmentalist “Greenie” profile	LOHAS consumer profile
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethics waiver / ethical quality</li> <li>• Idealistically motivated</li> <li>• Mainly political motives for action</li> <li>• Action based on logical consistency for change</li> <li>• Little prospect of mass movement / non-commercial</li> <li>• Change through abstinence / boycott</li> <li>• Focus on environmental conservation and nature</li> <li>• Neglecting commercial fashion styles and trends</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No waiver of certain things, rather grasping the right alternative / lifestyle quality</li> <li>• Motivated by convenient integration of ethical values into their lifestyle</li> <li>• Predominantly emotional embossed motives for action</li> <li>• Consumption as a central tool for change</li> <li>• Potential for mass movement / commercially compatible</li> <li>• Change through targeted insertion of existing power consumption</li> <li>• Focus on self-actualisation/ secondarily environmental conservation &amp; nature</li> <li>• Commercial fashion styles and trends commitment</li> </ul>

Target customers from both profiles are not “traditional fashion customers” and have established a need for alternative marketing strategies which will be analysed in the following.

**Alternative Marketing:** Creating awareness for alternative thinking requires alternative media to bring new messages across in order to make them more authentic and therefore more credible. Almost each fashion brand from the middle and upper market segment includes visuals and/or wordings in their marketing messages - superficially referring to how “valuable”/ “crafted, handmade and unique”/ “social responsible” and “eco- friendly” the product is. Their increased spreading of LOHAS marketing promises abuses severe LOHAS messages and leads to the focus of this study, which is determined to observe creative monobrand that go beyond conventional fashion and LOHAS image making. In terms of eco-fashion the younger generation seems to be more on the intersection of the two different consumer profiles as given in Table 1. To discuss the approach of younger customers and to analyse the customer profile from the same product group, three denim brands were chosen as examples: Bucks Öko-Jeans as an example of a low budget brand, and Levi’s and Diesel as two giants in this field. Before looking into these examples a non-commercial marketing approach from GREENPEACE, the world’s most popular non-profit organization is taken into perspective.

**Greenpeace Detox Campaign:** The current Detox campaign launched by Greenpeace in Summer 2011 is being followed as an overall example of non-profit alternative marketing series to create awareness for water pollution by the textile industry (Greenpeace, 2012). Greenpeace launches the Detox campaign, challenging the apparel brands teaming up with their suppliers and eliminating all toxic, persistent and hormone-disrupting chemicals from their products and production processes. The campaign is visually summarised by a logo containing the Chinese sign for water. Worldwide various events were coordinated in order to successfully create global awareness for the Detox campaign without running on a huge marketing budget, which would defeat the purpose of Greenpeace as a non-profit organisation. Nike, Adidas, Puma, H&M, C&A and Li-Ning have committed to Detox, in response to the growing international campaign (Greenpeace, 2012). The success of this campaign shows how Internet helps to globally spread alternative marketing methods in order to reach people and engage them into committing to the cause. Greenpeace showed not only successful alternative marketing strategies using the modern Internet platforms such as Facebook and Twitter in order to spread their word, but also the importance of proper branding of a campaign.

**BUCK House of Jeans:** For the global drinking- and groundwater pollution, the textile industry and the finishing process of jeans plays a dominant role. “Buck House of Jeans” is an example of eco-trendy designer jeans. The brand’s claim is the innovative technology that involves a production process from conventional organic cotton to finished designer jeans without water-pollution and without any limit to creativity (Buck House of Jeans, 2012). BUCK Jeans are mostly available over Internet and its commercial branding quality is at a very basic level. This business model is visually addressing the younger segment of LOHAS target customers and amongst other regular jeans wear they can choose a toxic free designer pair of jeans. The question is how to direct their attention into the area of LOHAS.

**Levi’s and Diesel:** By questioning, the role of branding to make a younger target commit to some kind of LOHAS lifestyle awareness, the following examples of Levi’s and Diesel have been chosen. These examples show how an originally low budget style marketing approach for non-profit organisations (like Greenpeace Detox) has been professionally adapted by highly commercial monobrand. The observation of these two brands gives an interesting picture of adapting to new and alternative lifestyle demands (addressing the younger generation) by integrating alternative marketing strategies.

In 2011 Levis introduced the campaign “Go Forth” following similar interactive dynamics as Diesel’s still ongoing “Be stupid” campaign launched in 2010. Although not directly linked to environmentally friendly production processes or social concerns, such campaigns show the effect of alternative marketing tools for the need to change mankind’s perception. Both campaigns and their activities can be followed through Internet. The exchange of news and staying in touch with a chosen community of “friends” as identification figures is psychologically important for a target from 16-29 years of age in order to identify themselves with some kind of lifestyle yet to discover. Following the natural process of personal development, it helps them to find their own identity on their way into mature adulthood. Both marketing campaigns are designed around this particular need. It offers some kind of identification with bold, concerned, socially aware and environmentally responsible ways of thinking in an entertaining, yet not superficial way.

**Diesel Campaign “Be Stupid”:** The “Be Stupid” campaign encourages consumers to take risks moving beyond the smart and sensible track of life. The campaign includes online, press and outdoor advertisements featuring “stupid” acts, a digital recruitment campaign for the Diesel music video/2010 catalogue, and viral activity outlining its philosophy. The campaign invites acts to include in the marketing campaign – addressing an aspect of vanity and the promise to fulfil the need of social recognition and “fame” (Diesel, 2012). “... The campaign chooses not to direct the customer into an ethical, sustainable “green” way of thinking, but surely implies that every individual is free to make its own “rebellious” choices and respect the choices of others no matter how strange they might seem.” (The thinking behind the campaign by creative director Mike Byrne on diesel.com).

**LEVI’S Campaign “Go Forth”:** Levis launches the campaign guiding the young target audience into a clear sustainable direction – encouraging him/ her to become a pioneer in making the world a better place. “... Our rally cry is “Go Forth.” A marketing idea, to be sure, but I see it as much more than that. It’s a call to create positive change in the world. More than ever, the world needs people with pioneering spirit who still believe that anything is possible. ... “Now is our time” manifests itself as we take this message around the world in the brand’s first-ever global marketing campaign (Robert Hanson, President, Global Levi’s® Brand on levis.com). Both campaigns neglect the quality of their products but invite the potential target customer to become posterboy/girl in their campaigns. “Let the world know how you made it better” is the hidden marketing message that appeals to the addressed target. The fact that Levi’s amongst the biggest global jeans brands plays the most active role in applied sustainable practises stays hidden in this campaign, but is to be found on another tab on its website.

**Conclusion:** The fashion industry has a significant impact on both environment and human well-being. For a complete action, designers, retailers and other industry members should participate and reflect their responsibility. Here, marketing visions play an important role. The success of similar marketing campaigns such as mentioned in this study is parallel with the understanding of new value system and communication through such alternative media while giving new messages. Understanding consumers’ attitudes and buying behaviour is critical to develop relevant marketing and merchandising strategies. Today’s established LOHAS thinking and synchronized marketing refers to a target group of intellectual, socially established, wealthy individuals with an open and aware mind towards sustainable issues, in opposition to the “greenies” that are opposing to consuming fashion and are commercially not an interesting fashion target at all. People in the LOHAS crowd tend to be well informed, discerning and sceptical of advertising claims, therefore, it is necessary to think generally differently about marketing to this group. They like to be addressed in an ethical way, showing that they care about the environment without losing “quality of life”. Educated consumers from approximately 16 to 29 years of age are increasingly becoming more intelligent to advertising tactics, which makes alternative marketing a great tool of subtle promotion. Within the natural spirit of youth, they are also looking to express themselves in a unique and individual way. The observed marketing strategies, in this study, referring to a young, dynamic, educated and fashion-aware target, are neglecting the fashion aspect and placing the individual in the center – in or outside of the establishment - free to express own “personal” values and believes, that are of course being channelled by the marketing industry.

Among the given examples in this study, as a differentiation it can be claimed that: The Greenpeace Detox campaign shows an immense presence of a potential and active target from 16-29 years of age. Buck’s offers a 100% sustainable product lacking the direct marketing approach to reach out to these potential customers.

Levis is encouraging their target to think and act responsibly also offering a 50% sustainable product line. Diesel encourages

their customers to think and act rebellious, but aware - not mentioning any sustainable aspect in their product categories. Given these observations these studies conclude that in eco-fashion marketing new strategies are being discovered in order to address a younger and different target. Therefore, in terms of tools and media, the internet and its powerful communicative platforms are very relevant. Fashion works as a subtle carrier in these “philosophical missions” carried out under the general topic of “how to make the world a better place”.

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